



**Wood Type:**  
Softwood

**Durability:**  
Slightly durable

**Treatability:**  
Extremely difficult

**Moisture Movement:**  
Medium

**Density (mean, Kg/m<sup>3</sup>):**  
470

**Texture:**  
Medium

**Availability:**  
Available at specialist  
timber merchant

**Use(s):**  
Joinery - Exterior, Joinery  
- Interior, Flooring,  
Structural use, Cladding

**Colour(s):**  
White/cream (to pale  
yellowish brown)

Also known as: European  
whitewood, silver fir, Norway spruce

### Introduction

Shipments of European whitewood are made up of both silver fir (*Abies alba*) and Norway spruce (*Picea abies*). The relevant information for both trees is included in this entry, including the mechanical properties. The structural species mix 'British spruce' comprises Norway spruce (*Picea abies*) and Sitka spruce (*Picea sitchensis*), grown in the UK and Ireland. The mechanical properties quoted for the UK are for this species mix.

### Environmental

Not listed in CITES. Believed available from well-managed sources. Check certification status with suppliers.

### Distribution

**Silver fir:** Its natural habitat is in the mountain regions of Central and Southern Europe. It occurs in northern Spain, Corsica, and in the Balkans across Bulgaria to the Black Sea. In the east, it is found from Poznan in Poland, and south through Warsaw to the Carpathians. The tree was introduced into England in 1603.

### The Tree

**Silver fir:** It grows to a height of about 37m with a diameter of about 1m but under favourable conditions it is often a larger tree. In open conditions of growth, it retains its lower branches for 40 or 50 years, but after that age they begin to fall off.

**Spruce, Norway:** Its average height is 36m with a diameter of 0.75m or more, but its best development is in the Carpathian mountains where it reaches 60m in height and up to 1.8m in diameter.

### The Timber

**Silver fir:** The timber closely resembles that of Norway spruce (*Picea abies*) but is slightly less lustrous. It is almost white in colour, with a yellowish-brown cast and faintly marked annual rings. The grain is straight, and the texture fine. The wood weighs 480 kg/m<sup>3</sup> when dried.

### Drying

**Silver fir:** Dries rapidly and well, with little tendency to warp. There is a distinct tendency for knots to loosen and split.

**Spruce, Norway:** Dries rapidly and well, but with a tendency for knots to split and loosen.

### Strength

**Silver fir:** Its general strength is similar to that of Norway spruce, but it is harder on side grain.

**Spruce, Norway:** Norway spruce in general is similar to Scots pine in all strength categories. That grown in the UK is rather weaker when green, but after drying there is little difference between the two types.

### Working qualities

**Good - Silver fir:** The wood works and finishes in similar manner to that of Norway spruce. **Spruce, Norway:** The timber works easily both by hand or machine tools, and is capable of a smooth, clean finish. It takes stain, paint, varnish and glue satisfactorily, and nails and screws well.